

G. Perreault / Houghton
County Bd
Public Wks
45929

HOUGHTON COUNTY BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS
HOUGHTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE
HOUGHTON, MICHIGAN 49931

18

June 24, 1992

Mr. Philip Schutte
Community Relations Coordinator
Office of Public Affairs (PS-19J)
U.S. EPA, Region 5
77 West Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Mr. Schutte:

Per your request for comments on the E.P.A.'s plan for the Torch Lake Superfund Site, please except the following on behalf of the Department of Public Works and Houghton County.

We would recommend that the E.P.A.'s decision for the Torch Lake Superfund Site be Alternative T1 - No Action, for the following reasons:

- That
Elect
Perreault*
1. An earlier study done by the Michigan D.N.R. and your study have found "the human health risks are within the U.S. E.P.A.'s acceptable range."
 2. Through the use of gates and natural barriers, human access to the tailings has been curtailed in the past few years.
 3. Much of the tailings are currently being utilized by various parties such as the county, for progressive projects resulting in significant areas of the tailings being covered already. We anticipate that this will continue in the future.

The Lake Linden and Tamarack City tailing sands are being used by us for sewage lagoons. A recent inflow/infiltration study indicated that future needs may require that we build another lagoon. Requiring coverage of the tailings could add significantly to these costs.

4. We would instead suggest that the E.P.A. and others support projects that will accomplish covering the tailings on a less costly basis. Examples abound. The Village of Lake Linden has covered a significant portion of their tailings and built a park there. The Michigan Dept. of Public Health has monitored the water in the area a number of times and has found no health hazard, permitting public swimming in the area.

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Further they have plans for a nine hole golf course that could accomplish the same objectives as your's.

The Houghton County Road Commission uses the Point Mills sand for road construction and winter sandings. The winter sanding has saved the lives of many county residents. Our winters are difficult and not having the sands could be costly financially, but more importantly in terms of human lives.

Tailing sand is also used for the highway access road at our airport to solve winter ice problems.

We are considering using the Tamarack sands for composting of materials such as leaves, branches, etc. This could add to the humus base to encourage vegetation on the tailings.

We do not support any E.P.A. plan except no action because Houghton County has caused no pollution nor dumped any tailing sand, nor permitted anyone to use the tailing sands for any reason other than sewage lagoons. We took ownership of the tailing sands to help the local communities.

We are concerned about being named a PRP such as in the recent drum removal problem. We felt that we were improperly named and forced into a difficult legal situation. It took extensive efforts to reach an agreement with the other parties to ensure that the costs were addressed without any major taxpayer involvement.

Recently, Houghton County cut its 92/93 budget by as much as 7.5% due to decreasing revenues. As such we do not have the funds to expend on covering the tailings or extensive legal battles. Many local comments have been made concerning the E.P.A. only requiring access to lands we own and then not naming us as a PRP. If your office could guarantee this in writing, we would be most appreciative since it would alleviate our financial concerns.

We are also concerned about the future development of the area if we remain an E.P.A. Superfund Site. Taking no action on the tailings and recognizing no health hazard could remove the negative image of such a designation.

Houghton County would be willing to seek various E.D.C., D.N.R. and other grants to accomplish the same goal of covering the sands via local solutions to the problems. Local leaders working with the mining interests should accomplish this at considerable savings.

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We hope that you will take our concerns into consideration when making your final decision.

Sincerely,

Gerald Perreault /ts

Gerald Perreault
County Commissioner and Chairman, Board of Public Works